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Eagles Ready To Kick Off 2016 Campaign

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Eagles Ready To Kick Off 2016 Campaign

GS Softball Opens Season in Starkville



Bryan Johnston

Softball | 2/10/2016 3:30:00 PM

Story Links

ON THE DIAMOND

The Georgia Southern softball team travels to Starkville, Mississippi, to open the 2016 season at the Bulldog Kickoff Classic, hosted by Mississippi State University. The Eagles open the season on Thursday at 6:30 p.m., against the host Bulldogs in a game that will be streamed live on the SEC Network+. On Friday, GS takes on Tennessee Tech at 11 a.m., and then Alabama A&M at 1:30 p.m. On Saturday, the Eagles play Tennessee Tech again, this time at 10 a.m., and wrap up the weekend with a game against Houston at 12:30 p.m. All times listed are Eastern.

FACILITY AND TICKET INFO

Georgia Southern will have the honor of being the first team to play in brand-new Nusz Park, Mississippi State's new \$6 million softball facility. The address is 425 Lakeview

Drive Mississippi State, MS 39762

Admission is free to all games at MSU this weekend.

[Here's the tournament site.](#)

THE WEEKEND FORECAST

Here's the [forecast for Starkville, Mississippi](#). Be sure to follow Georgia Southern softball on Twitter ([@GSAthletics_SB](#)) for any potential schedule changes this weekend due to the weather.

YEAR NO. 5

Georgia Southern head coach [Annie Smith](#) begins her fifth season at the helm of the Eagles. Her tenure in Statesboro has taken the Eagles to new heights with two SoCon Regular Season Championships and two SoCon Tournament Championships as well as overseeing the transition to the Sun Belt Conference in Smith's four previous seasons. During her tenure, Smith has advanced to the NCAA Tournament twice (2012 and 2013) as the Eagles have quickly made a name for themselves within the regional and national landscape.

Smith enters the 2016 campaign with an overall career record of 122-110. In 2014, she became the fastest coach in Georgia Southern history to reach 100 career wins when her team posted a 4-0 victory over Appalachian State on April 5.

Smith joined Georgia Southern with 16 years of experience as a collegiate assistant coach, serving at Missouri for six seasons before heading to Mississippi State for nine years, handling all aspects of the program. In 2006, Smith was promoted to associate head coach of the Bulldogs and returns to Starkville this weekend with her Eagles.

WHO'S BACK?

The Eagles return 12 players from last year's squad, including five starters (fielding and DP) and two pitchers. Offensively, five of Georgia Southern's top six regular hitters in terms of batting average from a year ago return: [Taylor Rogers](#) (.345), [Emily Snider](#), [Alesha Mann](#), [A.J. Hamilton](#) and Morgan Johnson.

In the circle, GS returns two pitchers who saw action last year. Kiera Camp led the team in appearances, games started, complete games and wins last year while [Heather Felt](#) was second in appearances.

THE NEWBIES

Georgia Southern welcomes six newcomers to the program this year. Here's a look at each of them and where they might fit in:

[Amanda Chambers](#), a junior pitcher from Liliburn, Georgia, who transferred from St. Petersburg College

[India Davis](#), a sophomore infielder from Conyers, Georgia, who transferred from Southeast Missouri State

[Hannah Farrell](#), a freshman infielder from Jesup, Georgia

[Andrea McKenzie](#), a junior catcher/infielder from Lynn Haven, Florida, who transferred from Wallace State Community College

[Dixie Raley](#), a freshman pitcher from Milledgeville, Georgia

[Kaylee Ramos](#), a sophomore utility player from Sugar Hill, Georgia

SEASON OPENERS

Since 1990, the Eagles are 12-13 in season openers and will look to build on that mark when they take on Mississippi State Thursday evening on the SEC Network+. Georgia Southern has won its last five season openers, including all four under head coach [Annie Smith](#).

SCOUTING ALABAMA A&M

Alabama A&M (18-25, 7-9 in SWAC) is set to return much of its offensive production from 2015 as it prepares for the 2016 campaign. Leading the way for said offense – which ranked second or third in the SWAC in many offensive categories – is junior outfielder Eriel Lawson. Lawson led the Lady Bulldogs in batting average (.398) and steals (11) last season. Also set to return to the fold are Tiana Sanders and Ariel Smith, who were first and second, respectively, in hits for Alabama A&M.

The biggest loss that the Lady Bulldogs must contend with in 2016 is filling the hole left in the rotation by first-team All-SWAC pitcher Anisa Britt. With Britt having graduated, Alabama A&M is expected to look toward the likes of Jordan Bradley and Rachel Sanders, among others, to step forward as a potential No. 1 starter. Bradley is the most experienced pitcher returning, as she appeared in 23 games, starting 15 of them, and amassed a 5-8 record with 35 strikeouts. - courtesy SWAC.com

The Eagles and Alabama A&M have never met on the diamond.

[AAMU's 2015 stats](#)

[AAMU's 2016 roster](#)

SCOUTING HOUSTON

Houston was picked to finish third in the 2016 American Athletic Conference Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Cougars closed out the 2015 season with a 28-27 overall record and 10-7 in the American Athletic Conference to finish third. The Cougars defeated Memphis, 1-0, in the opening round of the conference tournament, but fell in the semifinals to Tulsa.

The Cougars' top two hitters from a year ago are gone, leaving catcher Courtney Klinger as the top returner. She hit .319 with seven home runs a year ago. Senior pitcher Julana Shrum returns after going 13-10 with a 2.62 ERA and 68 strikeouts in 149.1 innings pitched.

The Eagles and Cougars have never met on the diamond.

[UH's 2015 stats](#)
[UH's 2016 roster](#)

SCOUTING MISSISSIPPI STATE

Mississippi State went 36-21 last season, earning a trip to the NCAA Regionals. Junior McKenzie Toler led the Bulldogs' offense last year, hitting .347 with seven home runs and 38 RBIs. Slugger Caroline Seitz led the MSU offense with 15 home runs and returns while the duo of Kayla Winkfield and Loryn Nichols combined to steal 62 bases in 2015.

In the circle, Alexis Silkwood was the workhorse of the staff last season and returns for her junior campaign. Last season, she went 26-16 with a 2.85 ERA, 216 strikeouts, 118 walks and 19 hit batters in 235.2 innings pitched. She threw 63 percent of the Bulldogs' innings last year, appearing in 47 of 57 games.

GS is 0-5 all-time against the Bulldogs, last playing in 2005. The two played a doubleheader in Starkville in 1998, and played single games at tournaments in Tampa (2000, 2001) and in Atlanta (2005).

[MSU's 2015 stats](#)
[MSU's 2016 roster](#)

SCOUTING TENNESSEE TECH

Tennessee Tech is the preseason pick to win the 2016 Ohio Valley Conference crown as voted on by the league's head softball coaches and sports information directors. Tennessee Tech posted a 33-28 overall mark while going 15-11 in the OVC to finish fourth overall last season. The Golden Eagles earned the No. 4 seed in the Conference Tournament and went on to win its seventh tournament crown. Bonnie Bynum enters her fourth season at the helm of her alma mater and will have junior pitcher Danielle Liberatore back in the circle this year after she was named to the All-OVC second team and the Tournament MVP last year. Liberatore ranked second in the OVC in earned run average (2.30), strikeouts (283) and shutouts (6).

Senior infielder Sabrie Neeb and sophomore catcher Bayli Cruse will also be back this year after earning OVC All-Newcomer honors last season. Neeb is the team's top returning hitter after compiling a .325 batting average with 39 hits, eight home runs and 20 runs batted in. Cruse hit .280 with 46 hits, five home runs and 24 RBI. - courtesy OVCSports.com

Georgia Southern and Tennessee Tech have played 11 previous times with the Eagles winning five of those contests. The series began in 1993 and the two last played in 2013, a 1-0 win for the Eagles in Statesboro.

[TTU's 2015 stats \(PDF\)](#)
[TTU's 2016 roster](#)

UP NEXT

Next weekend, the Eagles will head to Madeira Beach, Florida, to participate in a tournament hosted by Eastern Michigan University. GS is scheduled to take on North Florida, Providence, Marist, Villanova and UMass-Lowell.

RANDOM STATS AND NOTES

Career Games Started - by position (active)

A.J. Hamilton: 221 total - 221 C

E. Snider: 107 total - 107 OF

M. Robinson: 104 total - 104 1B

T. Rogers: 76 total - 48 OF; 28 DP

A. Mann: 51 total - 30 2B; 14 SS; 7 DP

M. Mazur: 42 total - 42 3B

K. Camp: 22 total - 22 P

R. McGuire: 14 total - 14 DP

H. Felt: 13 total - 13 P

Eagles by States (18)

Georgia: 13

Florida: 2

Illinois: 2

Tennessee: 1

Eagles by Class (18)

Seniors: 1

Juniors: 6

Sophomores: 6

Freshmen: 5 freshmen (3 redshirt)

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